

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 NIAMEY 03899 281418Z

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-07 AGR-05 L-03 SS-15 SP-02 IO-13

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FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 4667

C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 3899

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID, NG

SUBJECT: KOUNTCHE WORRIED ABOUT US PLEDGE OF SORGHUM FOR NIGER

1. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE IS DEEPLY DISTURBED BY REPORTS OF POSSIBLE BACKSLIDING ON US "COMMITMENT" OF 9,000 TONS OF SORGHUM. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US-NIGER RELATIONS, AND FOR AVOIDING WHAT COULD BE A SNOWBALL EFFECT ON OTHER DONORS, THAT WE STICK TO 9,000 TON FIGURE UNTIL FULL AND JOINT ASSESSMENT OF HARVEST RESULTS AND NIGER END OF YEAR NEEDS SHOWS THIS AMOUNT WILL NOT BE NEEDED. END SUMMARY.

2. UNDP REPRESENTATIVE ROTIVAL PHONED US URGENTLY AUGUST 28 TO SAY THAT IN HIS JUST COMPLETED FAREWELL CALL ON PRESIDENT, KOUNTCHE EXPRESSED STRONG DISPLEASURE AT REPORTS THAT "USAID" WAS CONSIDERING REDUCTION OF SOME 4,500 TONS IN PLEDGED FOOD DELIVERIES TO NIGER. PRESIDNET EMPHASIZED FOLLOWING POINTS IN PLEA TO ROTIVAL, AND INDIRECTLY TO US, THAT DONORS STICK TO PRIOR "COMMITMENTS" RE FOOD IMPORTS DURING HARVEST SEASON (1) EVERY KILO OF MILLET AND SORGHUM NOW BEING PRODUCED OR IMPORTED IS BEING CONSUMED; (2) IT MUCH TOO EARLY TO JUDGE RESULTS OF HARVEST NOW; (3) THERE HAS BEEN A LACK OF RAINS IN PAST EIGHT DAYS JUST AS THERE WAS LAST YEAR WHEN PREMATURE

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 NIAMEY 03899 281418Z

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DICTIONS; (4) ABOVE FIFTEENTH PARELLEL RAINS HAVE BEEN EVEN WORSE THAN USUAL; (5) EVEN WITH NORMAL HARVEST IT TAKES THREE MONTHS (ROUGHLY NOVEMBER - JANUARY) TO GET CROPS ON MARKET; (6) IF THINGS TURN OUT WELL THERE WILL BE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO CONSTITUTE LONG HOPED FOR RESERVE STOCK, EASING PROBLEMS IN FUTURE; THIS CHANCE WILL PROBABLY BE LOST IF DONORS DO NOT DO THEIR PART.

3. ROTIVAL, WHO IS A RELIABLE FRIEND AND NOT GIVEN TO EXAGGERATION, SAYS PRESIDENT SPOKE WITH UTMOST SERIOUSNESS AND FORECEFULNESS. SPEAKING AS COORDINATOR OF DONOR GROUP, ROTIVAL EXPRESSED STRONG HOPE THT US WOULD NOT MAKE ANY REDUCTIONS, LEADING WHAT COULD BE A CHAIN REACTION AMONG OTHER DONORS.

4. MINUTES AFTER ROTIVAL HAD BRIEFED ME, I WAS SUMMONED TO FOREIGN MINISTRY FOR REITERATION--CORDIAL BUT SERIOUS-- OF THE FOREGOING. SECRETARY GENERAL DIATTA UNDERLINED THAT HE SPEAKING AT REQUEST OF PRESIDENT. I REVIEWED FOR DIATTA STEADINESS AND PROMPTNESS OF US RESPONSES TO NIGER FOODS NEEDS AGAIN THIS YEAR -- I.E. , 21,000 TONS DELIVERED SO FAR, OUR RECENT ADVANCEMENT OF ARRIVAL DATE (NOW 30 SEPTEMBER) FOR FIRST HALF OF 9,000 TONS. NOTED THAT SECOND TRANCHE OF 4,500 TONS WOULD IN ANY CASE NOT DEPART US BEFORE MID-OCTOBER AND THAT THIS LEFT AMPLE TIME TO REACH A CONSIDERED AND AGREED JUDGMENT ABOUT ITS FUTURE DISPOSITION. POINTING OUT THAT IT WAS INEOITABLE THAT EARLY REPORTS OF GOOD HARVEST SHOULD FOCUS DONORS ATTENTION ON UPCOMING ALLOCATIONS, I ASKED DIATTA TO MAKE SURE PRESIDNET UNDERSTOOD THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO US DECISION TO WITHDRAW SECOND 4,500 TONS. WHAT WE WISHED TO AVOID WAS SITUATION IN WHICH WE WOULD BE DELIVERING 4,500 TONS IN NOVEMBER IN EXCESS OF NIGER'S NEEDS AT THAT TIME. DIATTA TOOK CAREFUL NOT OF EARLY DELIVERY OF FIRST TRANCHE OF 4,500 TONS AND EXPRESSED UNDERSTANDING OF OUR CONCERN ABOUT JUSTIFICATION FOR SECOND 4,500 TONS. HE ASKED FOR ASSURANCE THAT ONGOING ASSESSMENT OF NEED WOULD BE JOINT RPT JOINT US-GON EXERCISE, TAKING ACCOUNT INTER ALIA OF NEED FOR RECONSTITUTING CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 NIAMEY 03899 281418Z

RESERVE STOCKS. I SAID THAT, AS IN PAST, THIS WOULD BE THE CASE.

5. COMMENT. CHIEF DANGER AT THIS JUNCTURE IS THAT WE MAKE HASTY DECISION RE SECOND 4,500 TONS. ANY APPEARANCE OF BACKSLIDING NOW WHILE DIMENSIONS OF HARVEST REMAIN GUESSWORK AT BEST IS GOING TO HAVE NEED-LESSLY SEVERE REPERCUSSIONS, GIVING IMPRESSION

THAT WE ARE OPERATING ON BASIS OF SCANTY INFORMATION, SHOOTING FROM THE HIP, AND ABOVE ALL GOING BACK ON A COMMITMENT WE HAVE ALREADY MADE TO KOUNTCHE.

6. RECOMMENDATION. GIVEN LEAD TIME WHICH WE HAVE FOR DECISING ABOUT SECOND 4,500 TONS, QUESTION IS LARGELY ACADEMIC FOR NEXT FEW WEEKS. IF IT PROVES THE CASE BY MID-OCTOBER THAT NIGER WILL REALLY NEED SECOND 4,500 TONS, ASSUME THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT WE WILL SHIP IT. IF, ON OTHER HAND, NO SUCH NEED EXISTS, THERE WILL BE AMPLE TIME TO BRING GON AROUND TO AN AGREED FRAMEWORK FOR REDUCTIONS. FOR NOW, HOWEVER, WHILE PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE AND GON ARE INTENSELY AND TOTALLY PREOCCUPIED WITH WHAT JUST MIGHT BE NIGER'S FIRST GOOD, POST-COUP CROP, IT WOULD BE TRAGIC AFTER ALL WE HAVE DONE TO BUILD REGIME'S CONFIDENCE IN US, TO SUGGEST THAT WE ARE GOING TO HOLD BACK 4,500 TONS -- AN AMOUNT RELATIVELY SMALL, GIVEN THE STAKES INVOLVED.

7. IF DEPARTMENT AGREES WITH FOREGOING, IT WOULD BE USEFUL, IN VIEW OF QUESTIONS THAT HAVE NOW BEEN RAISED, FOR ME TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE PRESIDENT WITH A FEW MORE WORDS OF ASSURANCE ABOUT OUR INTENTIONS.

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